District Review Report

School District No. 36 (Surrey)

May 16 - 20, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Laureen Doerksen, Superintendent, SD 43 (Coquitlam)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Surrey
District Number:	36
Superintendent:	Dr. Fred Renihan
Date of Visit:	May 16 - 20, 2004
Team Chair:	Laureen Doerksen, Superintendent, SD 43 (Coquitlam)
Team Members:	Dawn Benson, Director of Instruction, SD 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap) Vic Bifano, Principal, SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson Rick Borelli, Superintendent, SD 68 (Nanaimo- Ladysmith) Doug Boyd, Principal, SD 60 (Peace River North) Peter Corcoran, Principal, SD 67 (Okanagan-Skaha) Karen Goetz, Teacher, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Judy Halbert, Ministry of Education Cheryl McCann, Parent, SD 5 (Southeast Kootenay) Heather Morin, Ministry of Education Pius Ryan, District Principal, SD 48 (Howe Sound) Marion Turner, Director of Instruction, SD 70 (Alberni)

Context

Surrey School District is the largest in British Columbia and one of the fastest growing districts in Canada. The student population is over 63,000 with students attending one of 99 elementary schools, 18 secondary schools, or 5 learning centers. Approximately one in four students attending school in Surrey is from a household in which English is not the first language. The District is divided into a number of areas that are distinguished by significant socio-economic differences.

The District is in the ninth year of the *Improving Student Learning Initiative* and is showing gradual, steady improvement in the achievement of its learners. The District has also embarked on an ambitious, inclusive Visions 2008 process to lay the foundation for future directions.

The District continues to face the challenges of rapid growth and increasing complexity. The rich diversity among the schools and program offerings in Surrey makes this district an exciting place to work and learn. The sense of purpose and teamwork displayed by Surrey School District will provide a strong foundation for its future efforts.

Summary of Process

The purposes of the District Review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

In conducting the review of the Surrey School District, the District Review Team:

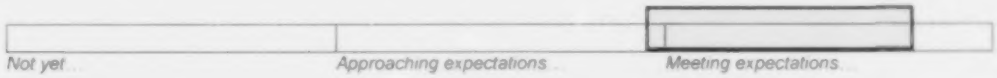
- Met with members of the Board of School Trustees, senior staff, partner group representatives, members of the curriculum instructional support team, and district helping teachers to review the district account ability contract and key district programs;
- Met with the Aboriginal Advisory Committee
- Met with the District Parent Advisory Committee
- Reviewed the school plans, school profile information, and the 10 Points of Inquiry at the following elementary schools: Bear Creek, Berkshire Park, Bridgeview, Cindrich, Chantrell Creek, Cougar Creek, Coyote Creek, Creekside, Crescent Park, Discovery, Dogwood, East Kensington Heritage, Henry Bose , Hillcrest, Hjorth Road, Holly, HT Thrift, James Ardiel, Janice Churchill; KB Woodward, Kennedy Trail, Kensington Prairie, Lena Shaw, Maple Green, Martha Currie, MJ Norris, MJ Shannon, McLeod Road, Newton, North Ridge, Old Yale Road, Prince Charles, Ray Shepherd, Riverdale, Semiahmoo Trail, Senator Reid, Simon Cunningham, South Meridian, Strawberry Hill, Sunrise, Surrey Centre, Westerman, White Rock; and at the following secondary schools: Earl Marriott, Fleetwood Park, Frank Hurt, Guildford Learning Centre, Guildford Park, Kwantlen Park, LA Matheson, Princess Margaret and Queen Elizabeth.

The District Review Team provided a debriefing to the District Leadership Team and the Board of School Trustees at the conclusion of the review.

The District Review Team appreciated the warm hospitality of the Surrey School District and the comprehensive material provided by the District.

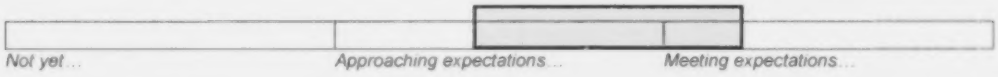
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



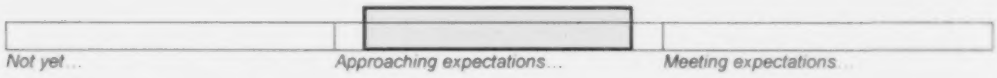
   - The district goals reflect the priorities of the schools and are focused on improving student learning.
   - School goals are focused on student achievement and are aligned with the district accountability contract.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



   - The District has a thoughtful rationale and solid historical basis for the selection of its goals.
   - Schools are responding to the needs of their communities in formulating goals.
   - Some schools have considered a range of data prior to determining improvement goals.
   - Some school goals are based on previous accreditation goals.
   - Some goals are based on perceptions and although not evidence-based, may be valid.

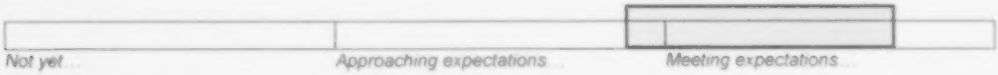
3. *Data:*
   Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



   - The District uses a wide range of data, including school marks, provincial assessments, standardized tests, and other summative measures to regularly evaluate and report on student progress. The Improving Student Learning Committee has made effective use of student performance data to plan for and to realize important improvements.
   - Many schools are at the early stages of utilizing appropriate assessment tools and establishing meaningful baseline data.

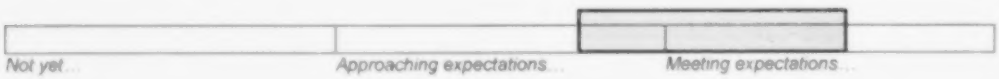
- Some schools are beginning to use Performance Standards and other classroom assessment data to monitor progress in goal areas and to inform instruction in an on-going way.
- Some schools are using EBS data to effectively monitor behaviour and to inform interventions.
- Many schools have not yet disaggregated data to identify the specific needs of identified groups of learners e.g., Aboriginal, ESL and males and females.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



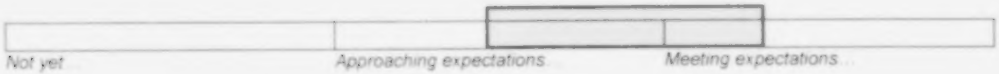
- The District provides a wide array of program supports, professional development, and networking opportunities. District strategies are well informed by research and build on best practice.
- The focus on literacy is reflected in schools across the district.
- The action research projects provide valued opportunities for educators to explore innovative practices to improve student achievement.
- Some schools are beginning to articulate the link between goals, strategies and desired results.
- Some schools are beginning to adjust instructional practices to achieve desired improvements.
- The Aboriginal Advisory Committee is working with the District to develop effective plans to increase Aboriginal student achievement.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



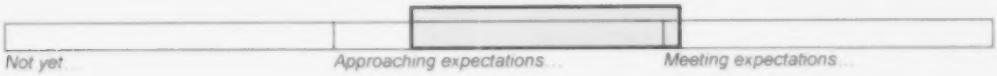
- The District has aligned its structures and resources in support of student achievement goals and is providing additional support to schools in the areas of greatest need.
- The district professional development opportunities, visioning process and action research networks all provide strong support to schools.
- The district work in developing assessment tools is appreciated by schools.
- Some schools have adjusted timetables, provided time for collaboration, and allocated resources to support their goals.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



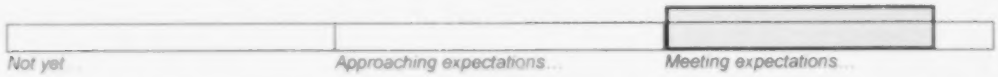
- The district focus on improving Grade 12 results has led to significant gains in the last nine years since the inception of the Improving Student Learning Committee.
- The District is regularly monitoring and reporting on student results. This information is used to guide decision-making and allocation of resources.
- Schools are in the early stages of developing capacity to set meaningful targets, monitor results and adjust instructional strategies.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



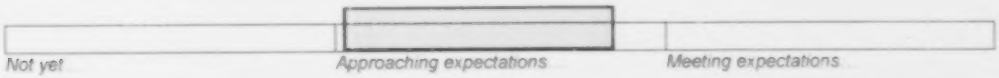
- District staff are visible and communicate regularly with schools about improvement plans.
- The district web site and First Class ® system are important and valued communication tools.
- Vision 2008 is providing an effective process for advancing the dialogue around student achievement.
- Schools provide information to parents in a variety of ways. Opportunities for communication with parents regarding school plans are being developed.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



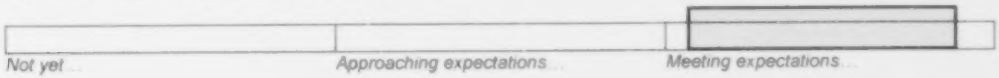
- The District plan has been influenced by school plans and school plans reflect district goals.
- Schools express enthusiasm and appreciation for the depth of district support that has led to a coherent unity of purpose.
- Some school plans reflect the unique priorities, needs, and contexts of their school communities.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:*
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- The District has provided training and support for school planning councils that was appreciated by participants.
- Parents are invited and encouraged to attend both school and district activities.
- Schools are at the early stages of involving parents in the active development of plans to improve student achievement.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- The District is committed to building leadership capacity.
- The District is proactive in creating collaborative learning net works with a focus on student achievement.
- The District provides an impressive array of opportunities for principal and teacher leadership development.
- Many schools foster significant leadership opportunities for teachers and students.

Strengths

Surrey School District has a clear vision for improving student achievement. The team observed many strengths in schools and across the district. These include:

- Strong district leadership focused on student achievement;
- The effective support provided by district staff and helping teachers;
- The concerted efforts to build leadership capacity;
- The proactive focus on social responsibility;
- The teamwork between the district and the schools;
- The strong focus on early intervention;
- The number of educators involved in the comprehensive action research and networking programs;
- The thoughtful, inclusive approach to long range planning through Visions 2008;
- The choice of programs available to Surrey students and their families;
- The targeting of resources to areas of identified need – both related to school demographics and to school goals; and
- The commitment, professionalism, and dedication of educators in meeting the diverse needs of their learners.

Promising Practices

The team observed a number of promising practices that may be useful to other districts in improving student achievement. These include:

- The Leadership Academy;
- SPARK and FLAME – early intervention programs;
- The Improving Student Learning Committee;
- The use of First Class ® to link district personnel and initiatives;
- The Learning Support Team service delivery model;
- The SESM (Science, English, Social Studies and Math) integrated program;
- Linking literacy and social responsibility goals with music and art;
- The development of local assessment tools; and
- The Y.E.S. (Youth Educational Support) program at secondary schools.

Recommendations

To strengthen school and district focus on student achievement and improving results, the team makes the following recommendations:

- Strengthen the culture of assessment *for* learning through the increased use of BC Performance Standards at the classroom and school level for goal setting, monitoring of student progress, and adjusting instructional strategies.
- Continue to pursue ways of actively involving parents in the review of student achievement data, the development of school plans, and leadership opportunities.
- Continue to identify specific strategies to address the needs of Aboriginal students in school plans. Continue to work with the Aboriginal communities to develop an Enhancement Agreement.
- Continue the significant initiatives underway in order to deepen understanding of the powerful effects this work may yield for students.